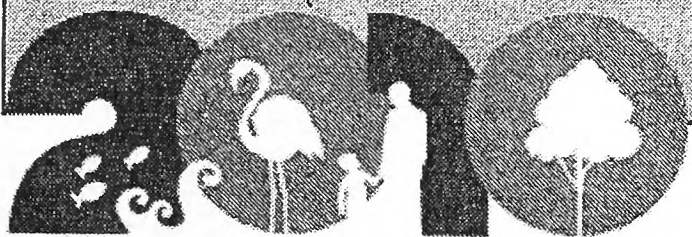
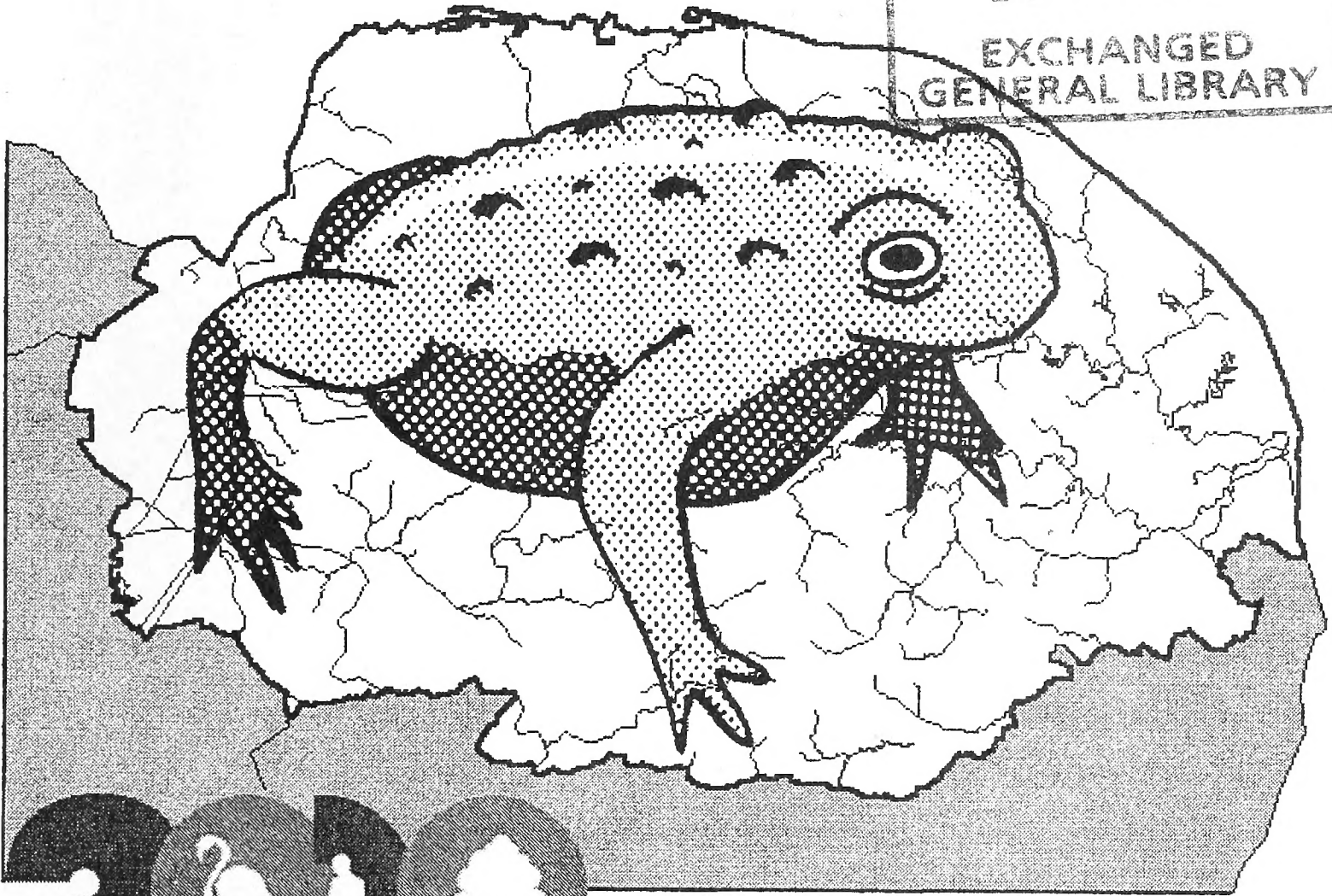


The Norfolk *Natterjack*

The quarterly bulletin of the Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society

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Articles with the camera symbol have associated photographs in the Nats' Gallery (centre pages)

Toad-in-the-hole....

Again a varied selection of articles for you to read as our nights draw in. Some articles were submitted after the deadline so they will be held over until the November issue. Other articles, particularly excursion reports arrived after I had left for a spell of offshore work so unfortunately they did not make this edition of 'Natterjack' either.

Members may have noted the passing of Dr. Richard (Dick) Hamond, one of the County's foremost marine biologists. A tribute to Dick is on page 12 and a full obituary will appear in 'Transactions' later.

My thanks to all contributors of articles and photos as usual and please keep those notes coming in. Can I also remind members that all photographs should be sent to Simon please.

FF

Rust Fungi

Colin Jacobs



On Sunday 6th June Eileen and I decided to visit Wheatfen which, coincidentally was also the Swallowtail butterfly open day. We then, after finding this out decided to spend the morning exploring Surlingham Wood for fungi and woodland plants rather than get mixed up with the crowds visiting the butterfly trails.

One of the most noticeable finds was that the Southern Marsh Orchids *Dactylorhiza praetermissa*, which were not in flower as yet, had their leaves covered in the rust fungus *Puccinia sesillis*. Almost all plants were affected and most were in a very poor state indeed. There are 64 records of *P. sesillis* in Norfolk, mainly from Wheatfen, by Ted Ellis who also had recorded it on many other orchid species.

This year was certainly the most I have ever seen in the Norfolk Broads. Nearby we also found *Puccinia phragmitidis* on Broad-leaved Docks *Rumex obtusifolius*. This is a common and widespread fungus on several plants.



Poppyland

Simon Harrap



Norfolk is famed for its poppies and, despite the use of herbicides, poppies are still commonplace; indeed, it is even possible from time to time to find fields that are almost red with them. By far the most abundant is the Common Poppy *Papaver rhoeas*, but there are others to look for. I am in the process of getting together the photographs for a field guide to British wild flowers (it will cover around 750 species, thus excluding most of the rarest and most localised plants, and has the snappy title 'Harrap's Wild Flowers'). And, after failing to find them in 2009, I wanted 2010 to be the year when I nailed the scarcer poppies.

I had already got some shots of Long-headed Poppy *P. dubium*. It is quite widespread across the count, seems to appear with some regularity in non-arable situations (e.g. roadside banks, even Beeston Bump), and dominates a sandy roadside field at Snettisham. Prickly Poppy *P. argemone* is much harder. I have seen it close to home, on a dry roadside bank at Little Barningham, but that was in 1998 and there have been only a couple of lone plants locally since then - we have been driving past that bank at Little Barningham on the 'school run' for the last six years, carefully checking the poppies, but to no avail. It was with some delight, therefore, that in 2010 the Rough Poppies appeared again, in good numbers, together with masses of Long-headed. Why the sudden resurgence? Bob Ellis suggests that the cold winter had broken the dormancy of long-buried seed, resulting in a sudden flush of flowers.

One down, but what about Rough Poppy *P. hybridum*, a plant of chalky soils? I have never seen the species on the acid sands locally, and even top tips from plant recorders Bob Ellis and Gillian Beckett had drawn a blank. Eventually, it was a trawl around the lanes in West Norfolk that produced dividends, with a few growing (together with Prickly Poppy) in the corner of a roadside field. Of course, like buses, Rough Poppy then just kept coming: Sedgeford, Fritcham and even Weybourne all produced colonies.

The four species of poppy are easily separated by their distinctive seed heads, but the flowers are also surprisingly different shades of red - something that the books do not make clear: 'Fitter, Fitter & Blamey' depict them as almost identical while 'Rose' only illustrates the flower of Common Poppy. To my eyes, if Common Poppy is bright red, Long-headed is a slightly paler and more orange-red, Prickly a deeper, blood- or pillarbox-red and Rough Poppy is a unique shade of pinkish-red (Fitter, Fitter & Blamey describe the flowers of Prickly as 'deep crimson', but as crimson is defined by the dictionary as a deep or vivid red, this does nothing to convey the pink quality of the flower). Prickly Poppy



has the petals well-separated, and Prickly and Rough both have small flowers, but as Common Poppies are frequently dwarfed, with small (sometimes tiny) flowers, the small size is not necessarily helpful. Incidentally, Common, Long-headed and (apparently) Prickly Poppies may or may not have black at the base of the petals, while Rough apparently always show black. Finally, when looking for poppies, it is well to remember that they may drop all their petals by the afternoon. This is not a problem with Common Poppy, as there are so many of them, but the other species 'vanish' as the day goes on, with Prickly Poppy being the worst offender. As for the photographs, well, I was blessed with some very calm overcast conditions so ... job done!

Seasearching off Norfolk: a scarce sea-anemone

Kate Risely



Norfolk is not famed for its scuba diving, and those interested in colourful marine life tend to head for the rocky shores and clear water of southern and western parts of the UK. However, Norfolk waters have a lot to offer those prepared to persevere.

I have been carrying out Seasearch marine life surveys in Norfolk since 2007, under the guidance of Dawn Watson and Rob Spray, the Seasearch co-ordinators for East Anglia. The aim of Seasearch is to record marine life, and map seabed types, using data collected from volunteer divers across the UK. The project is co-ordinated by the Marine Conservation Society, and all records are passed to the National Biodiversity Network. Surveys by divers are an invaluable way of picking up records of species that may be missed by surface-based sampling techniques, and the intensification of effort in East Anglia, a previously under-recorded area, has resulted in a number of new records.

Many of my Norfolk Seasearch dives have been on shallow wrecks and reefs off Cley, Weybourne and Sheringham, accessible from the shore. More recently I have dived with Great Yarmouth Sub-Aqua Club, who launch RIBs from Sea Palling to reach the many wrecks off the Norfolk coast. On 23 May 2010 we set off to dive a wreck at approximately 52°51'N, 01°50'E, about 11 miles out from Sea Palling. The name and history of the wreck are unknown, but large sections of metal superstructure are intact, and a few passes with the echo sounder clearly revealed a sizeable mass projecting from the side of a sandbank, which sloped steeply from 20 metres to around 40 metres. A shot-line was dropped, and we descended, landing on the wreck at a depth of 30m. The large, partly-collapsed sections of wreckage had the usual coating of



species from the North Sea to have reached the National Biodiversity Network. I have subsequently been informed by Dick Hamond that he has dredged small specimens offshore from Blakeney. I am sure the scarcity of records is due to under-recording, and to hydroids, bryozoans, tunicates and anemones, and I started to photograph the marine life. However, my camera's underwater housing was not used to this depth, and the shutter button was not responding properly. I had given up, and was following my dive buddy inside a section of wreckage, when I noticed some anemones on the inside wall of the cavity that were unusually tall and thin. The hole turned out to be a dead end, and as my buddy turned around to exit, I managed to convince my camera to take a quick photograph before backing out of the wreckage.

Later that day, I identified the unusual anemones as *Sagartiogeton laceratus*, more commonly known from sea lochs and harbours in Ireland and Western Scotland. My identification was confirmed by Chris Wood, the national Sea-search co-ordinator, who informed me that this was the first record of this

This anemone is probably common in sheltered areas inside North Sea wrecks, but it is, at the least, a new dot on the map for Sea-search and the NBN.

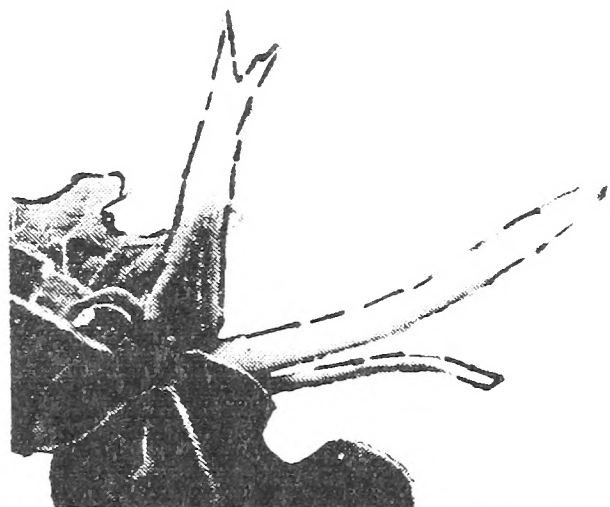
Ramshorn Gall

Colin Jacobs

Whilst taking a general walk around Wheatfen on the 26th July 2010 I found a young Oak (*Quercus robur*) to be the host of a single Ramshorn Gall.

Ramshorn galls are produced on the buds of oak trees by a tiny wasp called *Andricus aries*. The gall has a rounded base with two tapering projections, although the shape can be very variable. It's green at first, becoming brown with age. It is increasing northwards. The first Suffolk record I witnessed was found by Miss Cox of the Great Yarmouth Naturalists Society just a few metres from the Norfolk border at Herringfleet Hills in 2003. I then found one at Sandy Lane Belton in 2007.

This is my first Wheatfen record. David Nobbs does not have the gall recorded for the reserve so I may have been the first to find it there. Despite a thorough search I found no more that day.



The Heath Bumblebee, *Bombus jonellus*, in North Norfolk – a bee to look out for.



Nick Owens

The Heath Bumblebee is a scarce species in Norfolk, but probably much overlooked. Even in places where it is known to occur, it can be hard to find. This article aims to encourage people to look out for it over the coming weeks.

The table shows the months when I have seen queens, workers or males over the past four years. These records come from the coastal area between Holkham and Beeston Regis, with most records from my home patch of Weybourne and Kelling Heath. I suspect there is a continuous but thin population across the whole of this area of coastline and perhaps beyond. The website shows other recent records only from Catfield, indicating that careful looking can reveal it.

	April	May	June	July	August	September
2007		qm		w	w	wm
2008	q	qwm		m	qw	q
2009		q	w	wm	qw	
2010			qw			

The species is thought to have two generations in a season, similar to its close relative *Bombus pratorum*. Most other bumblebees have just one generation a year. I have seen queens in every month between April and September, except for July. Those appearing in April are probably overwintering queens. In May 2007 I saw queens emerging from a nest on Kelling Heath. In 2010 queens were not seen until June, perhaps because of the late spring. Queens were seen again in August and September, presumably from the second brood.

The double brood pattern allows the first generation to feed on Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*) and the second generation to feed on Common Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*). However, the species is by no means confined to heathland. In spring there is little nectar on heathland for any bees, so even heathland populations tend to feed on the heathland hinterlands, such as railway embankments and gardens in North Norfolk.

The Heath Bumblebee is similar in colour pattern to the Garden Bumblebee, *Bombus hortorum*, but the Heath Bumblebee differs in having a small face and a short tongue. Both species have three yellow bands – at the front and back of the thorax and on the first abdominal segment. The tail is white (except in northern populations of *B.jonellus*). The hairs on the heath bumblebee's pollen baskets are a noticeable rusty colour, whereas those of the garden bumblebee are black. Darkened forms of Heath Bumblebee queens and workers commonly



occur (especially in queens), with the yellow bands much reduced in width. Males have yellow on the head and the yellow collar continues right round to the underside.

A further distinction is that the heath bumblebee often feeds on small flowers such as heather, whereas the Garden Bumblebee, with its long tongue, rarely does.

I have seen queen heath bumblebees on Red Campion, Flowering Currant and Marsh Orchid (in Holkham dunes) in the spring. Workers sometimes visit Bramble (eg at Beeston Common). Males were recorded on Creeping Thistle and on Cotoneaster (in Cley village).

The only recent period when the species was abundant was in the autumn of 2007, when workers were numerous on Kelling Heath, visiting Western Gorse for pollen and Heather for nectar. In other years they have remained rather scarce even in the second brood. Perhaps 2010 will be another bumper year.

Please send any records to David Richmond, County Recorder, ideally with a photograph.

Tree Bumblebee (*Bombus hypnorum*) – another bee to look out for *Francis Farrow*

The Tree Bumblebee has turned up for the last two seasons on Beeston Regis and Sheringham Commons. This year two individuals were seen on the same day, 13th June. The second bee was probably a worker as it was quite small and had packed pollen baskets, which no doubt means that there was a nest nearby. They are easy to identify as they have a unique colour pattern – ginger thorax and a black abdomen with a white tip.

Since its first sighting in the UK in 2001 on the Hampshire/Wiltshire border it has expanded rapidly, throughout south-east England, especially since 2007. At the end of 2009 according to BWARS (The Bees Wasps & Ants Recording Society) records had been received from as far north as Northumberland.

Over the country the bee has been found in a variety of habitats from woodlands, verges, scrubby areas, parks and gardens. As its common name suggests it nests in rot holes in trees but also roof spaces and bird boxes.

At least this invader is not thought to be a danger to any other UK species. Again any records to David Richmond, County Recorder please.



NATS' GALLERY: August 2010



Heath Bumblebee *Bombus jonellus*
Left: queen on Kelling Heath, August;
note reddish pollen basket hairs. Below:
worker on heather. Scarce but probably
overlooked, this species is certainly one
to look out for this autumn. See article.
Photos: Nick Owens.



**Newborn Roe Fawn in a
Norfolk Wood** See article.
Photo: John Crouch.





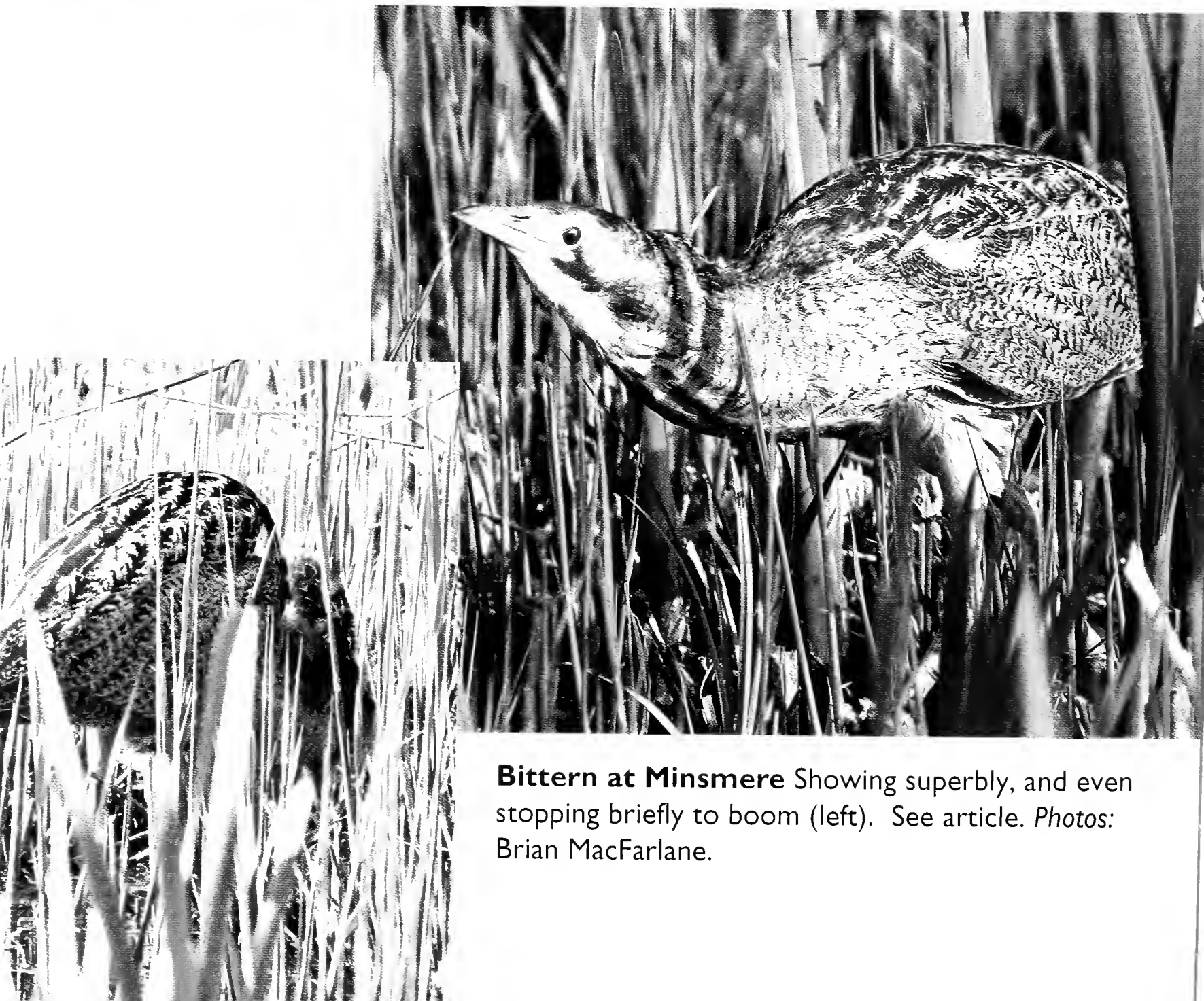


Poppyland Clockwise opposite: Prickly Poppy Little Barningham 25 May; Rough Poppy, Flitcham, 13 June; Long-headed Poppy Little Barningham 25 May; seed capsules (left to right) Common, Rough, Prickly and Long-headed Poppies. Above: Common Poppy Little Barningham 30 June, with black bases to the petals either absent or present. Below: Common Poppy en masse near Castle Acre 4 June . See article. *Photos: Simon Harrap / norfolknature.co.uk*

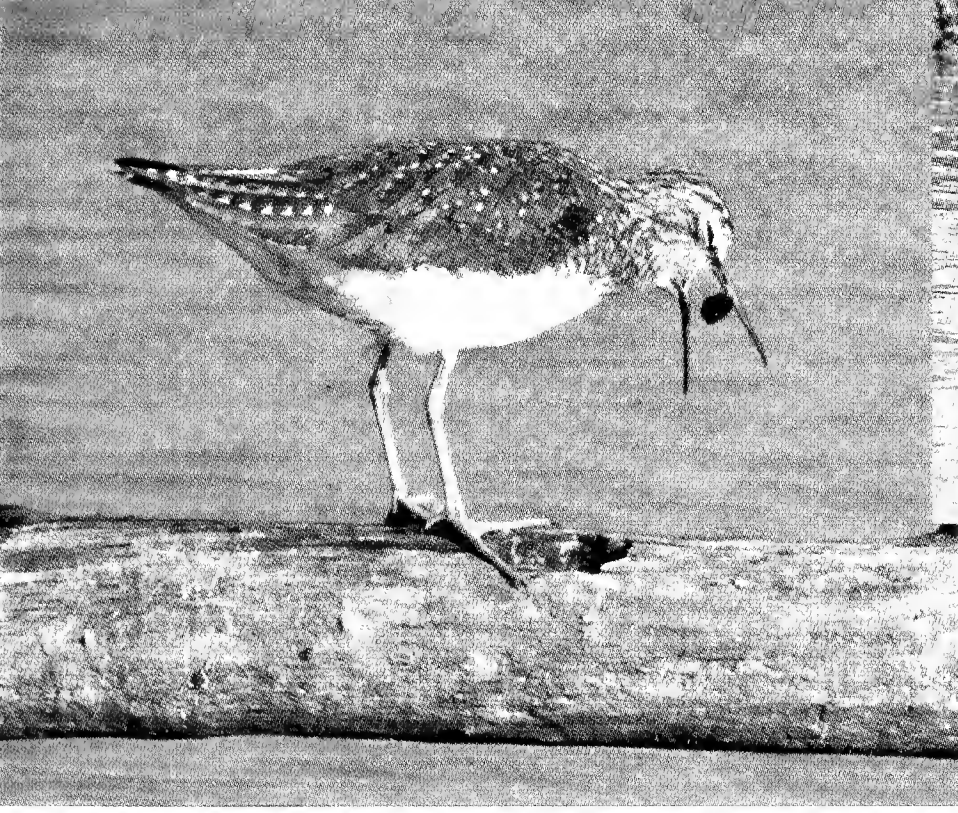




Little Owl:
A Bird With Attitude! See article. *Photos:*
Hans Watson.



Bittern at Minsmere Showing superbly, and even stopping briefly to boom (left). See article. *Photos:* Brian MacFarlane.

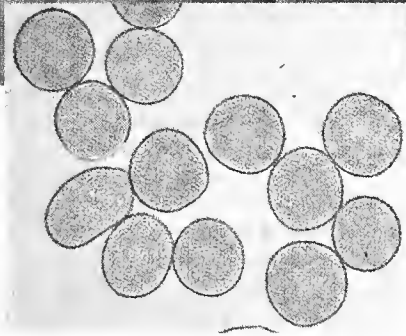


Strumpshaw Diary Swallowtails;
Cuckoo in flight, Grey Heron with jack
Pike and Green Sandpiper regurgitating
a pellet See article. *Photos: Brian
MacFarlane.*



Eagle Island A visit to Mull offered a chance to capture images of creatures that are rare or absent from Norfolk (or rarely seen): Clockwise: White-tailed Eagle, Hooded Crow, Otter, Black Guillemot, Golden-ringed Dragonfly, Jellyfish. See article. *Photo: Tony Howes.*





Rust Fungi: *Puccinia phragmitidis* on Broad-leaved Dock *Rumex obtusifolius*; *Puccinia sessilis* on Southern Marsh Orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa*; Wheatfen, 6 June (Photos Colin Jacobs). *Puccinia sessilis* spores (photo Malcolm Storey, www.bioimages.org.uk). See article.

Unlikely habitat? The car park adjacent to the Natural England Offices (by the old Jarrold print works) in central Norwich. A singing male Little Ringed Plover was present on 25 May followed on 23 June by an adult on the pool pictured. On 25 June four young were seen, three of which survived until at least 1 July. Photo: Dougal McNeill.





Badger damage to a Norfolk Road Badgers are powerful diggers and in some circumstances can cause significant damage. See article. *Photo:* John Crouch.

Sagartiogeton laceratus 11 miles off Sea Palling, 23 May 2010. This colourful anemone is more commonly found in Ireland and western Scotland. See article. *Photo:* Kate Risely.



Bittern Heaven

Brian Macfarlane



I crossed the border into foreign parts to visit Minsmere for the express purpose of trying to photograph a Bittern on the ground. It was a perfect sunny start, and I arrived in the Island Mere hide at 7am. There were four other people there including a couple from Wroxham. As usual this year there were not many birds about so I just enjoyed the quiet atmosphere.

At 8am a Bittern flew in from across the water and landed in the fringe reed margin about 70 yards away. It immediately started walking very slowly through the shallow reed beds picking off small fish as it went. I took a few shots in case it decided to fly away. To my amazement it gradually worked it's way nearer and nearer, and I was beginning to get very excited. It eventually came so close I had to change cameras as the longer lens would not focus that close. It actually walked across the front of the hide under the window sill. WOW! It was really putting on a fantastic display to the now increased number of viewers. I kept snapping away at such an opportunity not to be surpassed. Good job I did because without warning it boomed twice less than 20 yards away. Unfortunately it was facing partly away from me, nevertheless I was very pleased to have witnessed such a normally secretive activity.

After many memorable moments for me the bird looked at it's watch, and decided that 2 hours 15 minutes was enough in one place. The people in the hide were ecstatic at what they had seen, and so the bird took off to entertain another group of people maybe in front of the Bittern hide! The view in front of me settled back to it's extreme lack of movement, so I headed home as I had more than achieved what I had set out to do. Mission Accomplished!

Norfolk Fungi - A new flickr group

Colin Jacobs has sent in details of a new flickr photographic group called Norfolk Fungi. Details are as follows and anyone who is interested is invited to join.

<http://www.flickr.com/groups/1510663@N22/pool/>



A Bird with Attitude

Hans Watson



About three miles from my home is a mature oak tree in a hedgerow between arable fields, and in one of its larger lateral branches is a largish hole. For at least 4 years, this hole has been the centre of a small avian struggle for possession during the month of April. This annual ritual usually only lasts a day or two, and the outcome each year is always the same. The participants in this ritual are a pair of Little Owls, which always take up residence in late February or early March, and a pair of Jackdaws. The Jackdaws, working as a team, attempt to provoke the owl into leaving the nest-hole, by flying close to the hole and making quite a noise. The owl never takes the bait, and knows it has a big advantage in possession, and so remains inside. The Jackdaws tire of this stalemate after a day or so, and leave to nest elsewhere. The Little Owls have been quite successful at this site, rearing at least two young each year.

Although the bulk of prey taken by Little Owls consists of beetles, earthworms and the occasional small rodent, they have been recorded taking prey larger than themselves, such as young Rabbit, Brown Rat and Wood Pigeon. If a Jackdaw were to enter the nest cavity whilst a Little Owl was inside, I have no doubt that the Jackdaw, although larger than the owl, would be in serious danger of injury or worse. The "don't mess with me" expression on the face of a Little Owl is matched by its fierce disposition.

I am reminded of a story that I read many years ago about a bird photographer in a hide, erected a few feet from a Little Owls nest-hole in a tree trunk. The nest contained four young, about three-quarters grown. During a period when the parent owls were away from the nest, the photographer, looking through his viewfinder saw a large Rat climbing up the tree towards the nest-hole, and reaching it, disappear inside. Immediately, a loud hissing noise came from the nest. The photographer, fearing for the safety of the owlets, considered intervening, when one of the parent owls arrived at the nest and dived inside. The noise briefly grew louder before the adult owl appeared at the nest entrance, shook its feathers, and flew off. As there was now silence, and fearing the worst, the photographer could no longer resist leaving his hide and looking into the nest. To his surprise, he saw four completely unharmed owlets glaring up at him, and standing round a blood-soaked, and very dead rat. Birds with attitude indeed.



Strumpshaw Diary

Brian Macfarlane



Time to review what has been happening at Strumpshaw Fen, in particular things seen from the fen hide over the last three months. It has been generally quiet still with regard to the bird population. The biggest growth has been in the reed beds where the old biscuit coloured plants have been replaced by new green life. The rate has been 0 to 7 feet high in (60 secs) 3 months. The original family of Otters we enjoyed over the winter months has dwindled to one seen occasionally. Obviously the young ones have gone their separate ways, and now we see the male or female swimming by.

One morning there was a lot of thrashing about in the reed bed, and two Chinese Water deer were fighting. Unfortunately it was difficult to get a shot off because of their position so hence a rather indistinct photo. A Green Sandpiper came in close one day and I took several shots in quick succession, and I was surprised to see it was bringing up a pellet.

I had an enjoyable time trying to photograph Swallows one day in May as about 20 turned up one afternoon, but I have not seen ANY since, until yesterday, late June. There are still a few Swifts flying around. This year I have never seen or heard so many Cuckoos. They have been flying around the reserve 3 in the air at once! Terns have been, but not so frequently as last year. One did drop in for a meal, and I took a shot as it flew off with it's fish. Bitterns have been booming regularly until recently, and there are allegedly more than six birds on site.

The Heron, and Kingfisher have been very scarce so far, but recently saw a Heron catch a Jack Pike, and a Tench. The kingfisher is about but rarely comes to the perch in front of the hide. Also one Little Egret has turned up so I hope it will stay for the summer. I have also seen a fair number of Swallowtail butterflies, compared to last year.

Although it is looking overgrown with the new reeds appearing, I still go in great expectation of seeing that elusive exclusive. I have been 60 times this year already, so call me a 'Hide Hog' if you like, but you don't get your pictures if you don't put the time in. As the 'Vicar of Dibley' used to say, "*Trust me I'm a Vicar*".



Eagle Island

Tony Howes



In mid June a friend and I spent a week on the lovely island of Mull on the Scottish West coast. We were fortunate with good weather most days, our aim was to photograph as much of the natural wild life as possible, but targeting in particular, Otter, Golden Eagle and Sea Eagle.

The Sea Eagle pair on Loch Friesa failed to rear chicks this year, but they were still in the area, and we had good sightings as they soared together over the loch and surrounding hills. Although in different parts of the island we had good views of both species of eagle, they were, by their very nature, always going to be a long way off.

The Otters were more co-operative, we saw several, and were fortunate in having two come up on to the beach to eat their catch, giving us good opportunities with the cameras. One had a fair sized crab, the other a large flat fish. On another occasion we saw an Otter eating a fish in the water, it had bands of dark colour across an orange body, probably a rock goby.

Other birds photographed as we toured the island were Oyster Catcher, Common Sandpiper, (both very common along the shore line), Hooded Crow and Curlew. In Oban harbour we saw Black Guillemot, which nest there in holes in the harbour wall. Other creatures which had their portraits taken were Red Deer, jelly fish and Golden-ringed Dragonfly. The last is not found in Norfolk, so it was good to see them on the island.

At our B & B Siskins were the commonest bird on the feeders, the males looking splendid in their breeding colours, Great Spotted Woodpeckers were also coming for the peanuts.

In all, a very successful and pleasing stay on a beautiful island. Tranquil and peaceful, just you, thousands of sheep and the wildlife. Shangri-La.



First hour of life!

John Crouch



On a wet and windy day in early June this year Roseanna and I were surveying wildlife in a private Norfolk wood, as we carefully moved through a Roe doe suddenly appeared and charged out of the wood into a field of standing corn. The doe was soon joined in the field by a very fine Roebuck, as both the animals paced around the field, it was noted that the doe appeared to have traces of blood on her hindquarters indicating that she had recently given birth, so it was decided that we should leave the wood immediately.

As Roseanna attempted to step over a fallen log she noticed a movement at her feet, upon looking down she saw a newborn Roe fawn huddled up against the log, after taking photographs we promptly left the wood and moved to higher ground some eight hundred metres away.

After ten minutes of observation the doe was seen to enter the wood and reunite herself with the fawn, as we were watching this wonderful bonding between mother and baby a vixen was spotted slinking through the corn halfway between us and the deer.

Foxes are an efficient predator of deer fawns; this vixen had obviously picked up the scent of the doe in the wet corn and was seeking an easy meal to feed her cubs which were known to be not very far away where the fawn was spotted. However as she spotted Roseanna and I the vixen hurried her pace and quickly moved away from the area onto the next estate.

Badger damage to road surface

John Crouch



Density of the Eurasian Badger (*Meles meles*) is very low in Norfolk compared to many parts of the United Kingdom, however that said badgers can and do cause damage to Norfolk's infrastructure.

One example which is ongoing at the moment concerns a roadside sett in Central Norfolk; the main area of the sett has a number of entrances on one side of the road with several in the adjoining arable field, there are three entrances on the other side of the road which are linked to the main sett via numerous tunnels running under the road.

Though the road in question is in fact a country lane it is extremely busy and is near a local quarry which is served by a fleet of large Lorries, as a result of all



this traffic, the road surface has over the last few years been constantly subsiding due to the badger activity, but in May of this year one part the affected road had completely disintegrated, with a badger tunnel clearly visible underneath. Norfolk County Council's Highways department has made sterling efforts over the years to repair the road surface where it has subsided due badgers digging underneath, the latest effort was no exception. However, the area where the road had collapsed is now starting to subside again, which suggests that options to prevent badgers from digging under the road may have to be considered.

There are two main options, both of which require a licence from Natural England. Firstly, excluding badgers from the sett, secondly inserting steel shuttering alongside both sides of the roads edge in the area of the sett.

The first option is not really feasible due to the setts location and the number of badgers in the area, the second option would be costly but should solve the problem.

It is not over dramatising to state that there is the potential for a tragic accident to occur on this area of road which could result in serious injury or the loss of human life, which is not acceptable under any circumstances, particularly as it is avoidable in this instance.

Dr Richard Hamond 1930 -2010

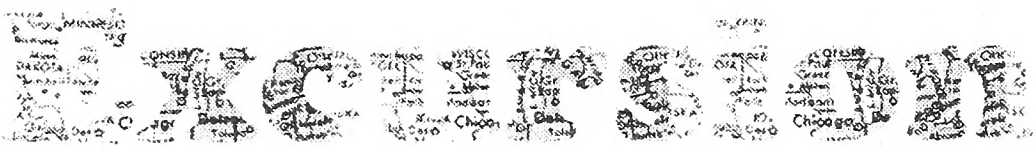
We regret to inform members that Dr Dick Hamond died suddenly on July 22nd at his home in Morston., aged 80. In many ways Dick was a hybrid between the professional and amateur naturalist. After reading Natural Sciences at the University of Cambridge he gained his PhD at Queen Mary College, University of London with research on the life-histories of polychaete worms. Except for a period of seventeen years (1968 to 1985) spent in Australia, Dick spent his life researching and recording the marine life in Norfolk's inshore waters.

A related passion of Dick's was microscopy, an essential tool for his work, but one he appreciated for its own challenges. He devised a number of low-cost techniques for improving the performance of instruments and was always very willing to help the amateur. Dick played a large part in the functioning of the Microscopy Group of the Society. He was President of the Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society from 1991 to 1992, following in the footsteps of his grandfather, Charles Annesley Hamond (President 1906-1907). Until just before his death, Dick was County Marine Recorder.

Dick's stout personage, almost always enclosed in his trade-mark 'dirty mac', was entertaining and informative company for us 'younger' naturalists, transported into a pre-computer age of museum-style taxonomy and enjoying every moment of it.

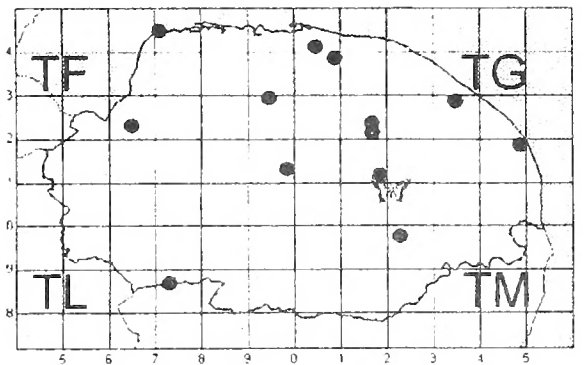
Tony Leech





Reports

● 2010-11 Field Meeting location
 St. Andrew's Hall
 Eaton
 Indoor meetings



HOLT LOWES

Sunday 11th July, 2010

This excursion, intended to provide an introduction to the identification of plants of heathland, peat bog and fen and led by Dr. Bob Leaney, was no less than the twenty-second field meeting in the Society's 'Wild flowers revealed' series. As usual, members of the Norfolk Flora Group and other Society botanists formed part of the party of over 20 people who gathered in the Hempstead Road car park on a glorious summer's morning, to be treated, before we even entered the Lowes, to the sight of a White Admiral and the pale primrose flowers of a specimen of the hybrid between the Lady's and Hedge Bedstraws - *Gallium x pomeranicum* - brought by Bob Leaney from another site. Many present agreed on how prominent Lady's Bedstraw seemed this year, in full unperturbed flower after a hot dry period that had rather desiccated and withered many other flowers and grasses by early July, particularly along roadsides.

Holt Lowes, an SSSI and Special Area of Conservation of 50 hectares or so, is a rich, well-recorded site botanically and otherwise and will be well-known to many members, so no attempt is made here to provide a full checklist of species seen during our visit. Agriculturally unpromising, it was established as a 'Poors Allotment' in 1807 (it is still the responsibility of Trustees) and it provides areas of sandy acid heathland but also valley mire habitat, rare nationally. Seepage of calcareous water from the valley side but also acidic nutrient-poor areas ensure a wide variety of plants, some rare in the county and, indeed, our region. The Lowes, though no longer designated one of their reserves, is managed for the Trustees by the Norfolk Wildlife Trust and management techniques include grazing as well as scrub clearance.

Passing from the car park through woodland to relatively high heathland, we saw Climbing Corydalis and a plant of Dame's Violet, but most of our attention was initially devoted to various pathway and pathside grasses and sedges of dry, acidic habitats, examples being Pill Sedge and Fine-leaved Sheep's Fescue. Heath Grass (*Danthonia decumbens*) was also seen, which Bob Leaney revealed was known as 'Marsh Hay' when formerly used for feeding horses in London.



We descended to the edge of the slightly acid fen to see, immediately, our first Holt Lowes botanical speciality, Creeping Forget-me-not (*Myosotis secunda*), relatively common in north and west Britain, but restricted now in East Anglia to this one site. Flying above it were not only various blue and red damselflies and Ringlets, but also Keeled Skimmers, another Holt Lowes speciality. The botanical richness of this wetland habitat and its margins at the Lowes can be indicated by a very selective list of more common species seen: Greater Birdsfoot Trefoil, Marsh Pennywort, Marsh Thistle, Wild Angelica, Fen Bedstraw, Meadowsweet, Yellow Flag, Ragged Robin, Hemp Agrimony, Cross-leaved Heath, Fen Pondweed, Marsh Willowherb, Yellow Flag, Lesser Spearwort and Heath Woodrush. Visually, the most striking feature was a copious display of Common Spotted Orchids - repeated further on - including a number with pure white flower spikes.

Beyond this first wetland stop, we encountered another Lowes speciality which was in many ways the most attractive sight of the day: a large, flourishing colony of the graceful, pale-green Wood Horsetail (*Equisetum sylvaticum*) lit by shifting sunlight filtering through the wind-stirred leaves of trees. This is its only Norfolk station, but cameras were brought into play to capture its beauty as much as to acknowledge its rarity. A little later, at lunchtime, Great Horsetail (*Equisetum Dalmatia*) was also recorded.

Among other species seen in the afternoon session were Remote and Flea Sedges, lots of Star Sedge, Slender and Marsh St. John's Wort, Black Bog-rush and a white-flowered Marsh Thistle. Also seen was the hemi-parasitic Marsh Lousewort (*Pedicularis palustris*), which seems to subdue somewhat the immediately surrounding vegetation. Most notably, the party completed its 'collection' of Holt Lowes specialities unknown or very rare elsewhere in East Anglia when a small number of Lesser Skullcap (*Scutellaria minor*) were found and, fairly close by at the edge of damp woodland, six to ten or so spikes of Common Wintergreen (*Pyrola minor*) were growing, though the latter had all but finished flowering, only one flower being on view! A separate small colony grows elsewhere at Holt Lowes, but this was not visited. At the Country Park end of the reserve, near the wooden tower where there is a river of *sphagnum*, thousands of Round-leaved Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*) were seen. The Lowes also supports Great Sundew. On a drier area, another parasitic plant, Dodder (*Cuscuta epithymum*), was recorded growing on the new growth of cut-back Gorse.

Holt Lowes is noted for its good population of adders, and one was indeed seen. Among the birds spotted was a Buzzard.

Many thanks to Bob Leaney for leading a most satisfying and instructive visit, and also to Bob Ellis and Bill Mitchell for their contributions to setting up and running it.

Stephen Martin





The next issue of '*The Norfolk Natterjack*' will be November 2010. Please send all articles and notes to the editor as soon as possible by **October 1st 2010** to the following address:

Francis Farrow, 'Heathlands', 6 Havelock Road, Sheringham, Norfolk, NR26 8QD Email: francis.f@virgin.net

Please send **all photographic material** to:
Simon Harrap, 1 Norwich Road, Edgefield,
Melton Constable, Norfolk, NR22 2RP Email: harrap@onetel.net

Membership subscriptions

The N&NNS membership year runs from 1st April to 31st March. During this time members will receive four copies of the quarterly *Natterjack* newsletter, and annual copies of the Transactions of the Society, and the Norfolk Bird & Mammal Report.

Membership renewals are due on *1st April each year* and should be sent to the treasurer:

- David Richmond, 42 Richmond Rise, Reepham, Norfolk, NR10 4LS.

New memberships should be sent to:

- David Paull, 8 Lindford Drive, Eaton, Norwich, NR4 6LT.

Current rates are £15 for individual, family and group memberships (£25 for individuals living overseas).

Cheques payable to: Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society.

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